

**YOUR  
SWIMMING**

**WE ARE  
MACMILLAN.  
CANCER SUPPORT**

**TRAINING  
GUIDE**

**Everything you need to know to feel prepared for your big challenge**



# THANKS SO MUCH

Thank you for joining Team Macmillan. We think you're amazing for having the dedication and commitment to take part in this event.

At the finish, the sense of achievement will be huge, knowing that you've not only completed your challenge but you've helped people affected by cancer too. Taking part in a Macmillan swimming challenge is no mean feat, so you'll need to dedicate some time to training. But don't worry – we're here to guide you in the right direction.

**'Thinking about everyone I'm helping, that's what spurs me on, knowing that every stroke makes a difference'**

Sharon Ferguson  
Great Scottish Swim participant

# Getting started

Before starting out it's a good idea to see your doctor for a medical or health assessment, particularly if you smoke, you're overweight or there's a history of heart disease in your family.

Whatever your reason for taking part in your challenge event, it's important to set yourself goals. This will give you something to aim for, which will keep you motivated. And don't forget that every step you take will help us help someone affected by cancer.

## Slow and steady wins the training race

The length and duration of your first swim depends on how fit you are. Don't be tempted to swim as far and as fast as possible. The best approach is to start slowly and build up over time. Your muscles and joints will take a while to get used to the activity so by not overdoing it in the first few days you'll reduce your risk of injury and enjoy your training experience more.

## Eat well

Diet will be important during training, so it's worth identifying your nutritional goals and coming up with a healthy eating plan. This will tone your muscles, improve your health and ensure your body has enough energy to keep up the extra exercise.

Make sure you're eating a good mix of carbohydrates and stay well hydrated. You may also find eating a carbohydrate snack two to three hours before you train will help keep your energy levels topped up.





## Training tips

### Plan

Training plans are ideal for organising your swims, you may find a training diary useful too. Use these to make sure you swim at regular times so you start to build up a routine. Knowing when you'll be swimming each week helps keep things structured, and means training swims can be incorporated into everyday life.

But remember your training plan has to be realistic – if you can't fit it easily around your commitments you're likely to fall behind.

### Swim together

Swimming with someone else will make training more enjoyable and help to keep you motivated, not to mention giving you someone to swap tips and advice with. Have a look for other Macmillan swimmers on our swimming Facebook page. There might be someone local to you looking for a swim buddy too. [facebook.com/macmillanswimmingevents](https://www.facebook.com/macmillanswimmingevents)

### Set yourself goals

Having realistic targets during your training will help keep you focused and ensure you're heading in the right direction. Make the goals specific to you and based on what you'd like to achieve. Review these regularly and keep them updated.



### **Warm up and stretch**

Stretching before you exercise prepares your body for the extra strain you're about to put it under, reduce the risk of muscle soreness and improve your flexibility. Try to hold your stretches for a minimum of eight seconds and if you're stretching in water, you'll need to maintain your body temperature. So jog on the spot or swing your arms and legs between each stretch.

### **Get out there and swim**

The sooner you start your training, the more enjoyable you'll find the swim on the day, so grab your gear and get down to the pool. Two to three sessions a week should be enough, but it's important to build up your distance gradually.

### **Mix it up**

Vary your sessions to keep things interesting, as well as making sure you condition yourself properly. You should combine interval training (short distances at speed, with rests in between) with endurance training (a long, steady, continuous swim), as well as sessions where you spend time focusing on your technique.

### **Technique, technique, technique**

If you are taking part in an open water swim, the experience will be very different to an indoor one. Without lane ropes and pool ends, your technique may need to change. See if you can find a local outdoor pool or lido (these are usually open from May onwards though some are open all year round). This will get you used to swimming in the open air. We look at open water swimming in more detail on page 7.

# Team Macmillan training schedule

Whatever your swimming experience, we want you to get the most out of your event, so it's important you put in the correct training and preparation. We understand that all swimmers are different and starting out at varying levels. So we'd recommend creating your own training schedule. There are a number of websites which are free to use, such as [taketothestreets.org](http://taketothestreets.org) where you can build your own personal training plan. For other training tips and advice, head to [macmillan.org.uk/swimming](http://macmillan.org.uk/swimming)

Although we appreciate that Team Macmillan swimmers will all be at different levels when they begin, this handy six week training schedule is a good base for anyone's training. It is suitable for those who can currently swim at least 20-25 lengths (if you are a complete beginner please get in touch and we can direct to you a starter programme before attempting this plan).



The schedule is based on swimming in a 25m pool so please adjust accordingly if you are training in a 50m pool. Choose whichever stroke you are most comfortable with (progressing towards full freestyle stroke), but aim to make your strokes as effortless as possible. To do this, The National Open Water Coaching Association recommend that you:

- 1** Focus on lengthening your pull (moving further in the water with each stroke). Keep your fingers together and make sure your hand pushes past your hips before it leaves the water at the end of the stroke.
- 2** Try to keep your body horizontal at all times – kick only lightly and don't let your legs drag low in the water. Your arms are the main force to propel you forwards so don't rely on your legs for driving power.
- 3** Rotate your body as you swim by swimming on your side. This will produce a stronger pull that will automatically lengthen your stroke.
- 4** Don't forget to stretch out after each session.

If you're finding the above difficult to achieve, a few sessions with a coach can make a real difference and is worth considering.



Don't forget to record your progress. Use this guide to scribble in or, if you have a Smartphone there are several downloadable apps available. These can also assist with your training and show how you're doing week by week.

## Week 1

### Monday

- 4 x 100m, rest for 12 breaths between each 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 8 breaths between each 50m
- 4 x 25m, rest for 4 breaths between each 25m

### Tuesday Rest

### Wednesday Rest

### Thursday

- 4 x 100m, rest for 12 breaths between each 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 8 breaths between each 50m
- 4 x 25m, rest for 4 breaths between each 25m

### Friday Rest

### Saturday

- 4 x 100m, rest for 12 breaths between each 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 8 breaths between each 50m
- 4 x 25m, rest for 4 breaths between each 25m

### Sunday Rest

(Total distance per session 700m)

## Week 2

### Monday

- 200m, rest for 12 breaths
- 4 x 100m, rest for 10 breaths between each 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 6 breaths between each 50m
- 4 x 25m, rest for 4 breaths between each 25m

### Tuesday Rest

### Wednesday Rest

### Thursday

- 200m, rest for 12 breaths
- 4 x 100m, rest for 10 breaths between each 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 6 breaths between each 50m
- 4 x 25m, rest for 4 breaths between each 25m

### Friday Rest

### Saturday

- 200m, rest for 12 breaths
- 4 x 100m, rest for 10 breaths between each 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 6 breaths between each 50m
- 4 x 25m, rest for 4 breaths between each 25m

### Sunday Rest

(Total distance per session 900m)

## Week 3

### Monday

- 400m, rest for 12 breaths
- 200m, rest for 10 breaths
- 4 x 100m, rest for 8 breaths between 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 4 breaths between each 50m

### Tuesday Rest

### Wednesday Rest

### Thursday

- 400m, rest for 12 breaths
- 200m, rest for 10 breaths
- 4 x 100m, rest for 8 breaths between 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 4 breaths between each 50m

### Friday Rest

### Saturday

- 400m, rest for 12 breaths
- 200m, rest for 10 breaths
- 4 x 100m, rest for 8 breaths between 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 4 breaths between each 50m

### Sunday Rest

(Total distance per session 1200m)

## Week 4

### Monday

- 600m, rest for 10 breaths
- 300m, rest for 8 breaths
- 4 x 100m, rest for 6 breaths between each 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 4 breaths between each 50m

### Tuesday Rest

### Wednesday Rest

### Thursday

- 600m, rest for 10 breaths
- 300m, rest for 8 breaths
- 4 x 100m, rest for 6 breaths between each 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 4 breaths between each 50m

### Friday Rest

### Saturday

- 600m, rest for 10 breaths
- 300m, rest for 8 breaths
- 4 x 100m, rest for 6 breaths between each 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 4 breaths between

### Sunday Rest

(Total distance per session 1500m)

## Week 5

### Monday

- 1000m, rest for 8 breaths
- 4 x 100m, rest for 4 breaths between each 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 4 breaths between each 50m

### Tuesday Rest

### Wednesday Rest

### Thursday

- 1000m, rest for 8 breaths
- 4 x 100m, rest for 4 breaths between each 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 4 breaths between each 50m

### Friday Rest

### Saturday

- 1000m, rest for 8 breaths
- 4 x 100m, rest for 4 breaths between each 100m
- 4 x 50m, rest for 4 breaths between each 50m

### Sunday Rest

(Total distance per session 1600m)

## Week 6

### Monday

- 1200m, rest for 6 breaths
- 3 x 100m, rest for 4 breaths between each 100m
- 3 x 50m, rest for 4 breaths between each 50m

### Tuesday Rest

### Wednesday Rest

### Thursday

- 1200m, rest for 6 breaths
- 3 x 100m, rest for 4 breaths between each 100m
- 3 x 50m, rest for 4 breaths between each 50m

### Friday Rest

**Saturday** Swim 1500m  
(one mile) straight

### Sunday Rest

(Total distance per session 1650m)

## Stretches

Make sure you spend between five and 10 minutes stretching after each session.

The following are examples of general static stretching exercises. These could form part of the cool-down programme at the end of a training session when stretches are held for 10 seconds. Or they could be used to improve the mobility and range of movement when stretches are held for 30 seconds.

### Chest stretch

- Stand tall with your feet slightly more than shoulder width apart and your knees a little bent.
- Hold your arms out to the side parallel to the ground with the palms of your hands facing forward.
- Stretch your arms back as far as possible. You should feel the stretch across your chest.

### Upper back stretch

- Stand tall with your feet slightly more than shoulder width apart and your knees a little bent.
- Interlock your fingers and push your hands as far away from your chest as possible, allowing your upper back to relax. You should feel the stretch between your shoulder blades.

### Shoulder stretch

- Stand tall with your feet slightly more than shoulder width apart and your knees a little bent.
- Place your right arm parallel with the ground across the front of your chest.
- Bend your left arm up and use your left forearm to ease your right arm closer to your chest. You will feel the stretch in the shoulder.
- Repeat with the other arm.

## Get your gear

If you are taking on an open water swim, it's important to get a decent wetsuit to keep you warm in the water. These can be hired or bought but are an essential requirement for most organised open water swimming events. Make sure your wetsuit fits well and is right for you. As no two swimmers are the same, this will be different for each person but dedicating a little time to finding your wetsuit will ensure you are as comfortable as possible on the day. Use a 'suit selector' online or visit a wetsuit stockist to help you decide and where possible, try before you buy. The sooner you get your wetsuit sorted, the sooner you can practice with the added buoyancy it will provide.





# FITTING TRAINING INTO A BUSY LIFE

You may not always be able to fit in everything we've suggested in the training schedule. But if you make a few changes to your lifestyle, you may well find some extra training time. For example, you could:

- get up an hour earlier and go for a quick swim before work
- if you've got a pool nearby, go for a swim in your lunch break.

And as well as swimming, you could work on your overall fitness by:

- walking instead of driving to the shops
- taking the stairs rather than the lift.

You can always ask for help with your training schedule at your local gym.



## The lowdown on open water swimming

### **Fascinating rhythm**

If you have some experience of pool swimming, it's relatively straightforward to make the transition to open water. In fact, when you don't have to turn around every 25 metres you can get into a rhythm which makes swimming much more enjoyable. Many people find they can swim 3–5km straight off when they get into the outdoors.

### **In your elements**

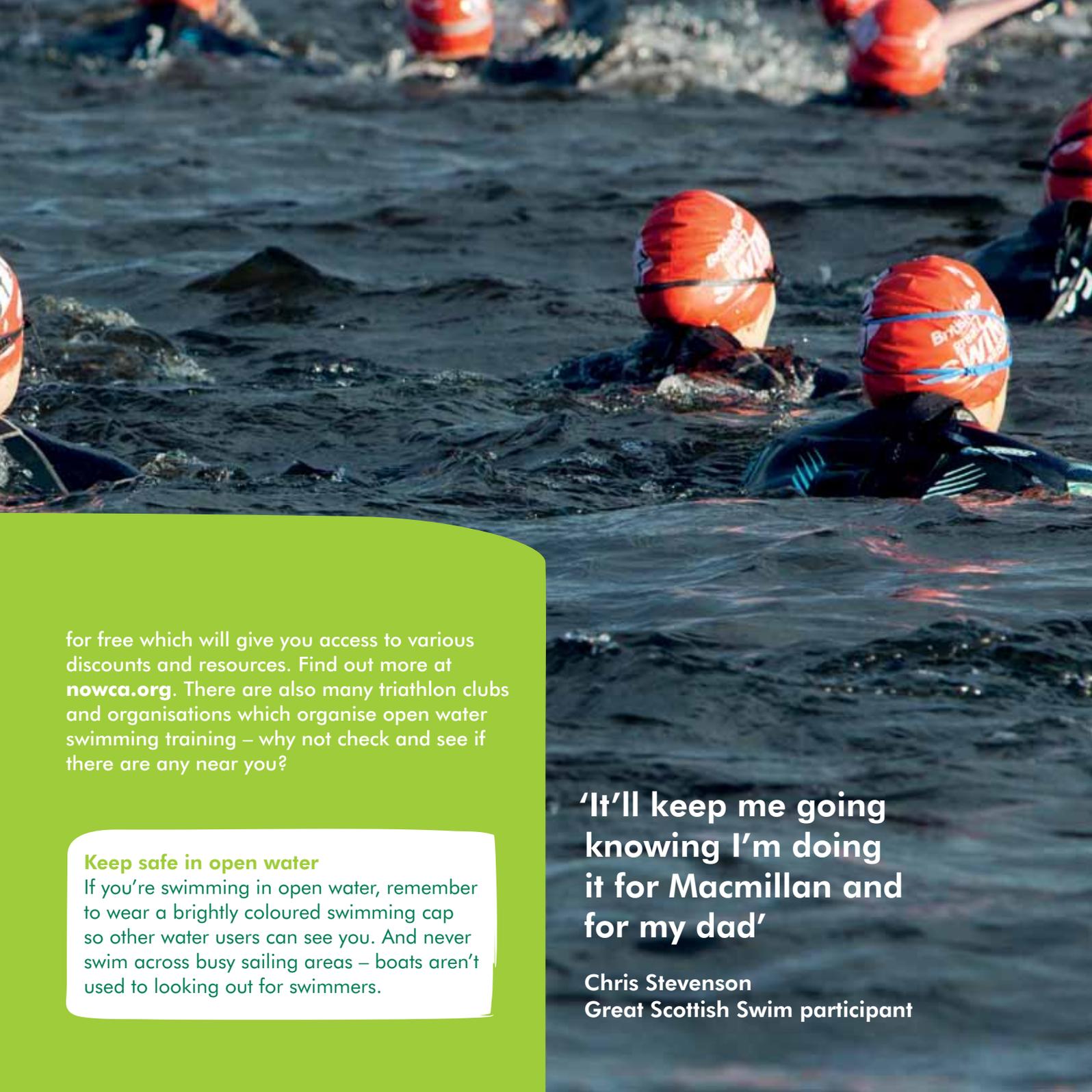
Unlike in a pool, in the open water there are no lane ropes or walls to push off from. Wind can make water choppy and rough, which takes a bit of getting used to, and chillier water will reduce your swimming speed.

### **Practice makes perfect**

We strongly recommend that you practise swimming in open water before the big event. Find a map of venues across the country where open water swimming is possible at [outdoorswimmingsociety.com](http://outdoorswimmingsociety.com). You'll also find details of events throughout the year where you can get some experience of swimming outdoors.

### **Help from the professionals**

If you want to take your training to the next level, why not get some professional coaching? The National Open Water Coaching Association's (NOWCA) website has details on all the NOWCA-accredited lakes and where you can find your nearest coach. You can register

A group of swimmers in the ocean, wearing bright orange caps and black wetsuits. The water is dark blue and choppy. The caps have white text on them, including 'Byron' and 'Macmillan'.

for free which will give you access to various discounts and resources. Find out more at [nowca.org](http://nowca.org). There are also many triathlon clubs and organisations which organise open water swimming training – why not check and see if there are any near you?

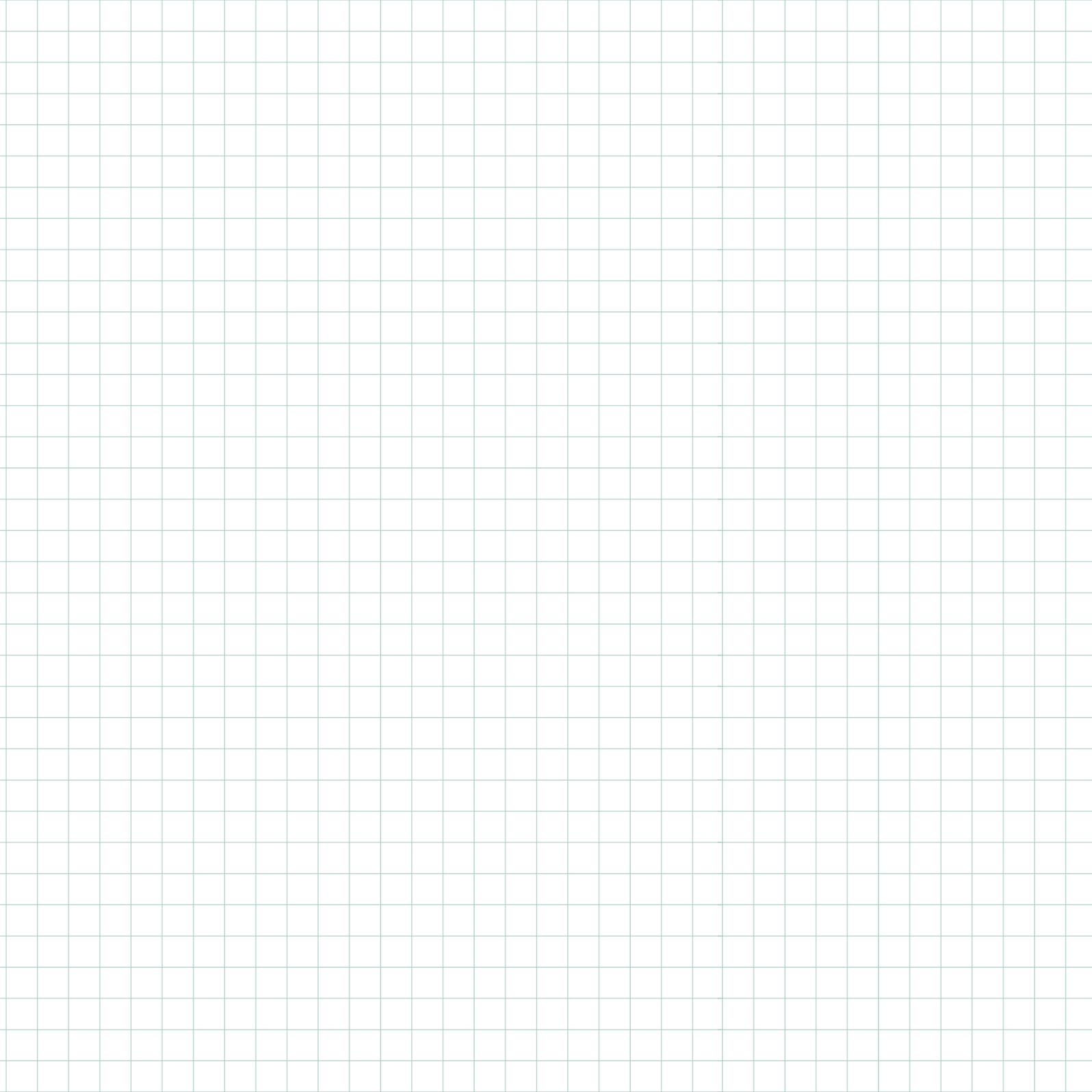
#### **Keep safe in open water**

If you're swimming in open water, remember to wear a brightly coloured swimming cap so other water users can see you. And never swim across busy sailing areas – boats aren't used to looking out for swimmers.

**'It'll keep me going knowing I'm doing it for Macmillan and for my dad'**

**Chris Stevenson  
Great Scottish Swim participant**

**SCRIBBLES**



## Enjoy yourself

You've signed up to take part in an incredible event so make the most of the experience. Enjoy swimming in the UK's lakes, docks and pools, and know that you're helping to change lives. And, if you start losing motivation or finding training tough, just take a deep breath and remember this: we couldn't do what we do without you.

## More support?

If you have any more questions about training for your swim, head over to [macmillan.org.uk/swimming](https://macmillan.org.uk/swimming) or email us at [swimming@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:swimming@macmillan.org.uk)

If you'd like to know more about cancer or you'd like to speak to someone about your own experience, get in touch. We're here for you every step of the way. Just call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** (Monday – Friday, 9am – 8pm). Or visit us at [macmillan.org.uk](https://macmillan.org.uk)